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ABSTRACT

This guide was designed to expand teachers' vision of symbolic play and to assist teachers in providing an appropriate play environment. The guide maintains that teachers of young children should consider symbolic play an essential element in the total learning environment. It presents ways for teachers to: (1) set up physical areas; (2) acquire and use various resources and props; (3) define and expand their role to suit their students' temperament; (4) adapt symbolic play to accommodate the individual differences among their students; (5) deal with aggressive play; and (6) develop techniques and strategies to use when encouraging children to play. Accompanying the text is a list of play scenarios (such as an airport, camping, or doctor's office), appropriate props and materials, and vocabulary terms. (MDM)

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# ENCOURAGING SYMBOLIC PLAY IN YOUNG CHILDREN
# A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING CREATIVE AND IMAGINATIVE EXPERIENCES

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## Preface

Teachers of young children observe their charges each day as the children explore their ever expanding world and challenge new experiences and ideas. Teachers also see the wide range of differences in how children learn and grow and become. Teachers consider the ages of the children, their cultural backgrounds, the interests they have, their learning styles, their experiences, their skill levels, and their different personalities to provide appropriate and interesting activities. Teachers are responsible for the physical environment, planning day-to-day activities, and implementing stimulating situations.

One of the least understood areas of child development involves the child's imagination -- the creative, magical part of the child's life that clarifies and expands previous experiences and opens new areas to explore. This is symbolic play. Symbolic play is defined as the process of "adopting a variety of roles and acting out role-appropriate actions with a variety of realistic or imaginary props" (Bergen, 1988, p. 209). Symbolic play is an essential part of play as children relive what they have seen and heard, try on unfamiliar roles, or investigate new ideas. Some children readily use objects around them as props for their play, or they comfortably project themselves into a different world. Others hesitate or are restricted in their participation in symbolic play -- they may have experienced disapproval for creative play, lack confidence in their abilities, are very literal in their approach to life, or are accustomed to playing primarily with single purpose toys and games.

This guide was written to expand the teacher's vision of symbolic play and to assist teachers in providing an appropriate environment for play. There is so much

more to 'pretending' than having a playhouse area in the corner or a variety of prop boxes. The sections in this guide acquaint the teacher with the complexities of symbolic play and its many benefits. The primary focus, however, is to assist teachers in considering symbolic play as an essential element in the total learning environment. It examines ways to set up the physical areas, acquire and use many resources, and define and expand the teacher's role to suit the child's temperament yet stimulate participation at increasingly more complex developmental levels.

Creative approaches to symbolic play, for most children, require guidance from the design of the physical environment to the limited yet essential intervention by adults. This guide assists the teacher in adapting symbolic play for individual differences among the children. It provides strategies for teachers to facilitate symbolic play. It suggests ways to get the child involved who watches longingly as others pretend to go on a picnic. It introduces ideas on how to deal with aggressive play that has escalated into a power struggle and is out of control. There are suggestions for organizing the resources and objects teachers can collect to provide for symbolic play. And, of course, there are lists of ideas to use in the imaginative, creative areas of play.

This guide focuses on play that involves interaction with materials and/or other children and adults. It also addresses play of many types for the differing developmental levels of children in any program. It is important to include a variety of play modes and patterns in order to offer the most appropriate experiences for all children. It suggests ways to encourage symbolic play that is pleasurable, interesting, and engages children in increasingly complex and challenging activities that develop

higher level thinking, greater skill development, and increased understanding of intellectual and social interactions.

This guide also introduces techniques and strategies to use when encouraging children to play. Some children find it somewhat difficult to participate in activities that involve imagination and creativity -- they may be naturally reticent in social or cooperative play with peers, they may feel restrained by their perception of adult-imposed restrictions, they have experienced cultural restriction on play activities, they may have little practice in "pretending," or they are still participating primarily in exploratory play. Symbolic play evolves as a part of cognitive and social growth, and the teacher and the total environment impact such growth. These guidelines describe ways to facilitate children's engagement in experiences of symbolic play, especially with the use of representational play objects or props -- the materials that stimulate children's imagination.

**Introduction**

Children are unique and fascinating, and they develop and grow in a hundred different ways simultaneously. One of our tasks as teachers is to provide a rich, stimulating environment that maximizes the opportunities for this development through appropriate experiences and activities. It is also our function to recognize and respond to the differences in each child and to provide challenges both to the group and to the individuals in the group. Teachers are also sensitive to parents' expectations for their children and to their perception of "preschool." There are many stresses and uncertainties in the lives of both parents and children today that impact

the preschool experience. Children are eager to acquire new knowledge, to develop many skills, and to increase their understanding of the world around them. Teachers have a responsibility to maintain a balance between the immediate needs of the child and family and the long-term goals for individuals and for society. A formidable task.

Imaginative, involved play offers children the opportunities to learn about 'life,' about themselves, and about others. They chase, tease, explore, try new activities, laugh, and join with others in pleasurable episodes. They can approach unfamiliar, sometimes frightening experiences as part of their play. They become engrossed in activities that mimic adult roles and explore new ideas through play. Play involves the consolidation of physical and mental activities (Hughes, 1991) and continues to be an important part of children's lives.

Play has again become the focus of much study and attention, and reseachers and others define theories of play, examine children at play, and propose play prescriptions (Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne, 1984; Monighan-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn, Almy, 1987; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Hughes, 1991). What are the overall conclusions of this revival of interest in play behavior? Play is necessary and important for growth of the whole child, is essential for the child's mental health, acts as a great teacher, affirms a sense of community, allows for the expression of impulses, permits introduction of novel and innovative ideas, and encourages socialization. The questions remain for teachers: How do teachers provide physical features in rooms or at centers for the different types of play that we want to stimulate? What does a play environment actually contain? How do teachers encourage the children to use it? What can be done to facilitate positive social

experiences through imaginative, dramatic play? How do teachers use creative play to 'teach' concepts or introduce ideas?

**Play in the Lives of Children**

Play has a universal attraction for both children and adults, and history records involvement in play in all cultures through the use of imaginative interactions with peers, involvement with active games, and manipulation of symbolic objects (Smilansky, 1968; Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne, 1984). It is seen by Fromberg (1990) as the ultimate integrator of human experience -- as children play they integrate the aesthetic and the logical, the real and the imagined. It is episodic, present-oriented, voluntary, active, often rule-bound, and a condition of learning. It is usually pleasurable for the young child. Play can also be a mask for cruelty and violence, sex and intimacy, power, or danger. These actions are sometimes excused with the response, "After all, they're only playing." To some, play seems trivial -- especially symbolic play that appears unstructured and open to changes by the players. However, Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984) feel that play actually guards a child's intimate moments. They feel it is a bridge between direct expressions of concerns and "real" talk and outright sharing of self.

Play in early childhood blends thought, language, affect, and imagination (Fromberg, 1990), and thus becomes a significant part of the child's day-to-day experience.

**Cognitive and Social Benefits of Play for Children**

Anthropologists, psychologists, educators, and others have proposed that play is essential to human survival, and play in children is a necessary element of development. Ellis (1988) stated that "the propensity to play is a biological system for promoting rapid adaptation to threats to survival that cannot be predicted" (p. 24). Ellis feels that play should be both prized and encouraged in all forms. Piaget (1962) describe play as a process reflective of emerging symbolic development. Vygotsky (1967) felt play is a facilitator of development that aids in the child's construction of symbolic thought that can then be manipulated by the child. Make-believe play could lead to 'games of construction' which Piaget proposed as representing an area of transition between symbolic play and non-playful activities or serious adaptation. Play has also been seen as crucial in the development of reading ability -- the symbol system becomes refined through the practice acquired during play, especially dramatic play. Both psychological and anthropological perspectives of play agree that the child's self-directed, instrinsically motivated play activity is pivotal in the construction of understandings (Fromberg, 1990).

Many experts today are concerned with the pressure on children to learn more so-called 'academic' skills early -- during the preschool years. "Readiness" has become the primary goal of many early childhood programs, and the term 'hothousing' has emerged to describe this educational acceleration. 'Hothousing' is defined as extending children's capabilities beyond their ability to control the experiences through their own design (Sigel, 1987). Chafel (1987), Elkind (1987), and Gallagher and Coche(1987) all stress that young children need to be protected against the dangers

of 'hothousing,' and they need opportunities for self-directed activities through play and other exploratory adventures as a means of self stimulation and healthy development. Chafel (1987) feels that play activities that invite the child to function slightly beyond his/her ability enhances intellectual development and avoids the negative effects of early academic pressure.

Johnson and Christie (1986) report that symbolic play involves both social interaction and conflict, and children derive experience in cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution through symbolic play. They also feel that this movement from real objects to symbols assists the child in becoming emancipated from concrete objects. Monighan-Nourot, Scales, and Van Hoorn (1987) describe how symbolic play offers the child an opportunity to subsitutue an imaginary situation for the immediate context. The children may use mental representations and behaviors during symbolic play to coordinate the roles of self and others in a rather covert, implicit fashion. Dansky (1986) reports symbolic play is associated with increased divergent thinking in children.

Play is often seen as related to the development of social competence. Children learn through their play situations to take the role of others, and thus decenter as they view the perspective of another. They learn to adapt and modify their behavior to the needs of other children in a play experience (Fromberg, 1990). They may also use many symbolic substitutions in play activities -- blocks and boxes become cars, bottles, food, or whatever else is needed in the play episode of that moment. Children use dramatic situations to integrate a variety of action into a meaningful context -- a child becomes a parent, cares for a baby, relates to a spouse, prepares

a meal, talks on the phone, and further practices the art of task and thought integration.

Play has traditionally been described by the perceived levels of complexity progressing from solitary play to minimal involvement with others to a complicated, goal-directed, somewhat rulebound activity with a group of children -- cooperative dramatic play. Play was seen as progressing in a hierarchal manner cognitively. Designations of the level of complexity of play were felt to be related to maturity of the child, but recently these ideas have been altered by suggested modifications of Monighan-Nourot et al., (1987) who contend that a child who is playing alone may not be participating in less mature behavior than a group in dramatic play. Some solitary play may serve to assist the child in developing his/her imagination or to refine complex new ideas cognitively. They feel there may be a "relative predominance" (p. 78) rather than an absolute hierarchy of mature behavior in play, and this predominance relates to the child's need at the time. As a result of this work, it appears that children of all ages need both privacy for solitary or on-looker play and social interactive play throughout the time they spend in groups.

Overall, play may be seen as a 'practice field' for learning to solve problems, for developing skill in human interactions, and for assessing one's own skills and abilities.

**Children's Use of Language and Play**

The preschool years are viewed as a prime time for the development of language skills, vocabulary, and communication proficiency, and one of the goals of

most early childhood programs relates to language development. Play episodes offer children an opportunity for group interaction with numerous verbal exchanges. Language increases in play situations as the child is called on by the play group to express ideas, feelings, plans, and other elements of human interaction. Researchers have found that language use becomes more complex, episodes of language use become longer, and children become less dependent on the use of concrete objects through participation in symbolic play situations (Monighan-Nourot et al., 1987). The early childhood environment needs to provide children with opportunities to use language, to converse with adults and other children, and to see that their use of language is appreciated (Cazden, 1988). Children who participate in developing a story line through symbolic play are seen as better able to tell an imaginative story in sequence, wait while another talks, and persevere in the story telling (Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Moran, Sayers, Fu, & Milgram, 1984). Children attain competence in communication partially through interaction with a variety of audiences as in the symbolic play group. They rehearse roles, develop interactive techniques, and spend countless time explaining, cajolling, manipulating, and even pleading with peers during such play experiences. All these language forms are essential to the development of verbal fluency and communicative competence.

**Girls, Boys, and Symbolic Play**

Most teachers of young children can easily describe the differences in play behavior and preference for type of play of males and females, and much of this has been substantiated by research. Both girls and boys enjoy and engage in symbolic

play, but the props used, the roles assumed, and the themes selected are different for each sex (Hughes, 1991). Girls appear to need fewer realistic props to initiate fantasy play in play settings adults have structured, but in child-initiated settings gender differences are seldom observed (Johnson & Roopnarine, 1983; Hughes, 1991). Girls choose domestic roles while boys prefer action and adventure roles that are often fictitious. Both sexes prefer same-sex roles; girls will occasionally take a male role while boys rarely take a female role. Girls prefer activities that are nearer the teacher, exhibit more dependent behavior in play, and receive more attention for compliant behavior, while boys are more active in rough and tumble play, receive attention for more assertive, negative, and independent behavior, play more adventurously, and engage in more group play that requires cooperation and strategic planning. Themes chosen by boys reflect these preferences for high drama and physical activity while girls' themes involve family scenes with more verbal interaction (Hughes, 1991). During the preschool years, children also tend to select same-sex play groups or dyads (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Serbin, 1978; Pellegrini, 1984; Saracho, 1987; Fagot, 1988; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Some of the skills required for seriation, number concepts, and other mathematical development may not be experienced as much by girls as by boys as a result of their play perferences. Boys, however, may not develop communication skills as readily as girls for they tend to participate less in verbal exchange play. Much of this research suggests that the early childhood teacher include activities in symbolic play that build on the interests of both boys and girls, to encourage both-sex group play, to model non-sexist roles, to introduce experiences in a non-biased manner, and to become more involved in activities often seen as

needing little direct intervention -- construction play, prop box play, special event play, and others. Numerous adaptations and modifications can be made in the play environment for avoiding gender segregrated, stereotyped play.

**Cultural Experiences and Symbolic Play**

Culture, ethnicity, and income level of children have been found to be significant determinants of play choice and behavior during play. Smilansky's (1968) landmark study that identified unique differences in play style, in the use of language, and in negotiation skill in groups of low-income and middle-income children led to other research that has reinforced the idea of play patterns differentiated by family income level. The reasons for the differences in play are less clear. Do various childrearing differences lead to different play patterns or are low-income children less comfortable in the middle-class school environment and thus do not display their normal play style? Creative narrative, humor, age-group inclusion, activity level, and other differences have been observed in a variety of cultural groups. Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Children from different backgrounds approach the business of play quite differently and their responses seem to reflect their cultural traditions, the childrearing practices of their families, customary play practices for boys and for girls, and the equipment and toys that are traditional for their culture or their recent experiences. A child from a homeless shelter or a refugee camp may respond greedily to the array of material found in most early childhood programs while the child of affluent parents who has an overabundance of toys may be stimulated by the creativity of a cardboard box. In some cultures, children are not free to explore new

objects or materials without prior adult approval, and thus in a preschool, these children may wait for permission to play. Other groups may segregate play by traditional sex roles. The specific differences in play are not as significant as the recognition by adults that children do not participate in play activities in the same way.

What is the important focus for the teacher regarding these unique traditions and practices of the children? Knowledge of the family background, consideration of the cultural practices, respect for the differences, the introduction of a variety of play activities that demonstrate an appreciation of the heritage the children bring, and the introduction of new play practices are basic tenets for the early childhood teacher. Consideration for play differences may also provide children from diverse backgrounds with new models for experiences with others, alternative ideas for use of materials, a look at a variety of lifestyles, or creative problem solving.

Opportunities and objects that allow these cultural and ethnic practices to occur naturally and on a regular basis are also necessary to include in symbolic play. Teachers should include relevant cultural and ethnic objects, food, clothing, music, and other traditional items in symbolic play not as a curiosity or as something that reinforces a stereotype but as a natural manifestation of the children's cultural and ethnic heritage.

Play behavior is different for each child that enters an early childhood program, and this is a reflection of individual development, the cultural experiences of the family, and of the larger cultural milieu in which that child has functioned. A variety of activities should be provided for the child to explore, investigate, expand upon, and

enjoy. Teachers also need to respect what the child brings to the group, to react positively to the many responses children offer to play situations, and to be able to adapt the environment for cultural, ethnic, and economic differences among the children.

**Violence, Weapons, and Superhero Play**

In describing symbolic play in young children's groups, the presence of violent and aggressive acts needs to be addressed. Two main issues surface: first, how do we deal with power play and play incorporating violent action; and second, what do we do when children emulate the current television or movie superheroes? Children's play often reflects themes of popular movies or TV shows and little evidence of children's imagination can be discerned in this play. Parks (1991) and Gerbner (1985) both describe children's fascination with monsters and larger-than-life characters -- these characters seem to help children deal with their fears of violence and aggression as well as their need to be powerful and aggressive themselves. These issues have always been present in children's play, but in the past the objects children used did not significantly limit their imaginations or restrict the creation of new characters and situations. Toys and other play objects were general in nature. Many of today's toys that are heavily advertised on television during children's programming are single-purpose toys; for example, children see a complicated laser gun on TV and use the weapon exactly as it is used on television. The child sees no deviation from that prescribed function (Striker, 1986). When less defined and open-use objects are used in symbolic play, the children's imagination seems to take over and cardboard tubes

may be guns, telescopes, or even telephones (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1990). Open-ended toys or common household equipment offer challenges to children for incorporation into symbolic play as any of a dozen objects. War toys so common today are used for violent acts against people, and children tend to use them only for that purpose.

Parks (1991) describes how current single focus theme play that follows popular television programs or movies often focuses on destruction of property, exploitation of weaker and vulnerable persons, perpetuation of gender stereotypes, and higher status of males. The negative consequences of following such play themes are not what any of us want for our young children. However, it is important to recognize that children use symbolic play to move from their current role as powerless children to the imaginative role of being independent adults in contol of situations. These actions reflect the natural responses of children as they attempt to understand these roles.

Children choose to participate in war games or symbolic play involving other violent themes even though they are discouraged or forbidden to do so (Parks, 1991). The teacher can assist children in controlling the action and in individual children's involvement as aggressors or victims (Rogers & Sharapan, 1991). A number of useful strategies are introduced later in this guide that can be employed to mediate the impact of violent theme play, and alternative choices for symbolic play can be incorporated through design of the environment, use of open-ended toys, and teacher suggestions for alternative actions.

**Encouraging Symbolic Play**

Play is an important part of children's lives, and imaginative play provides children many benefits in their overall development. Teachers who take time to arrange the physical environment and understand their role in symbolic play will be rewarded as they observe how children enthusiastically become involved in learning through this type of play.

**Planning the Environment for Symbolic Play**

The design of the symbolic play area is an essential component in providing the appropriate structure for symbolic play. The physical environment provides immediate access for the child and directs the complexity as well as the quality of play. The physical environment is more than equipment and materials. The arrangement of furniture, structuring of how and when symbolic play experiences are made available to the children, the amount of time allowed for play, and the organization of the space within the classroom are all components of "framing" and designing the physical setting and the interactive structure for symbolic play. Establishing the physical setting and designing the interactive climate is the primary responsibility of the teacher. Children take their cues from what they see and come to know about the importance of imaginative symbolic play within their classroom and within their own lives. Respect for children's play means respect for children, their characteristics and needs. Physical environments are composed of variable elements: tone, space, time, setting up, furnishings and materials, prop boxes, and projects.

**Emotional Tone**

It is the teacher's responsibility to create an atmosphere that is supportative of meaningful symbolic play. Children must know and feel symbolic play is accepted and supported in the room or environment in which they live. The flexibility of a child-centered schedule, allowance for spontaneous play, provision for a clearly defined space, inviting and accepting behavior on the part of the teacher all contribute to this atmosphere.

**Space**

Symbolic play can, of course, occur anywhere. However, adequate and specifically defined space needs to be provided in an early childhood setting. Special considerations should be made for symbolic play space.

Ideas to Try

* Dividers (e.g. shelves, display boards, or other low physical barriers) should be used to clearly define an area for symbolic play. Dividers may be part of the appropriate equipment for the play area and should be low enough for children to see over to observe other activities in the room and also to enable other children to see them.

* The play setting must be large enough to accommodate children so they can move around equipment and furnishings in the defined area. Children sitting on, or using, furnishings must have enough space to use them

adequately and properly if the goals of true symbolic play are to be fulfilled. They must be able to sit in a rocking chair, get in and out of a bed, move around chairs, and open and close doors and cabinets.

* If it is possible in an early childhood classroom, it is desirable to have play near a window to incorporate conditions of the outside into the play. Safety is a particular issue however, as children in their play may become quite inventive and use windows and doors as part of play and be up on a window ledge with amazing speed. Safety caps and plugs for electrical outlets must be used in the symbolic play area as children frequently take imitation to a very real level.

* Posters, pictures, mirrors, display racks for materials, and clothing should be placed at the child's level. Materials displayed in high places, or materials which are for adults and are not to be touched, are inappropriate for decorating in symbolic play area.

* A symbolic play area should as closely as possible approximate the theme or atmosphere desired. Extra equipment, pictures/posters, and unnecessary props only serve to frustrate and distract children from more involvement in their play. If the area has been designed that day for a garden but the kitchen furnishings are still part of the background, some children may find the setting less than authentic and choose not

to be involved or become somewhat distracted. Turn furnishings to the wall when possible, move extra furniture out, and help children concentrate on the props and play potential of a clearly defined play area.

* The symbolic play area should be kept to the side or at least out of the main traffic flow of the room. This kind of privacy allows children to play without having to constantly monitor their own behavior in relationship to other children not directly involved in their play. Watching other children moving by, watching teachers moving at very close proximity, or having continued, disruptive activity makes it difficult for young children -- especially those who may be unsure of their play skills and interactions with others -- to feel free and comfortable to play. Some areas may require specific definition by using tape or an edging, such as a rug, to help children know the boundary of their space. This is probably more important in a small room where space is a primary consideration in defining children's activities and behaviors.

**Time**

Adequate time is required for true interactive symbolic play to develop. Children need a block of time which is uninterrupted by change in routines or adult demands to adequately engage in their play. Hildebrand (1990) suggests symbolic play time needs to be a minimum of 30 minutes with a preference for approximately

50 minutes. The signal for ending of play time needs to be given to children 5-10 minutes before the end of play as they require time to unwind. A reminder of what is coming next is helpful to bring highly involved play to a conclusion.

Ideas to Try

* Offer symbolic play as an option during self-selected or work time. Often it is seen as an "arrival" or "catchall" activity where the same group of children use the area and new children or those who arrive late do not have the chance to play or choose friends. Symbolic play must be seen as a valid self-selected choice option where children may maintain reasonable decision making control related to their participation.

* At the end of the day, show children what could be a part of symbolic play the next day.

* * If the space allows, continue the play for more than one day in order for the maximum involvement to develop.

**Setting Up**

One of the most important aspects of making symbolic play useful and enjoyable is helping children become comfortable and familiar with the expectations and use of the setting. During the time for planning or selecting options for free play time, children should be told what is offered for play in the area and should be shown

a few sample pieces or props to serve as cues or ideas about what is in the play area for that day.

Ideas to Try

* Show props as part of opening circle to give a visual idea about the play potential. For example, if the symbolic play area has been set up for a fast food center a hat, sign, or perhaps some plastic food might be shown to the children to help them achieve a more complete understanding of how their play might be shaped by the equipment, materials, or furnishings presented. The symbolic play area is best used when children are given a chance to explore the arrangement on their own.

* Bring in a "mystery box" with several new open-ended items that could be used in symbolic play. Limit the number of players to the number of items in the box to stimulate interest.

* Introduce a different prop box every week to renew the focus of play. Let children brainstorm what might be done with items in the box.

* Have adults take the role of tour guide and accompany children in small groups to look over a symbolic play space and verbally label the major items. This "geography" tour may be most helpful to children who are

unfamiliar with how materials are to be used in an early childhood setting and may not give themselves "permission" to play in innovative ways. It is also helpful to children who need to be assisted in adjusting to any changes in the symbolic play space when it is rearranged.

* Have children and adults label objects and establish ground rules for equipment use to assist less verbal and socially sophisticated children acquire basic competence in their symbolic play skills with others.

**Furnishings and Materials**

There are endless sources of furnishings for symbolic play areas. Selecting and arranging furnishings requires an awareness of the significance of how designs can influence play and behavior. Furnishings should be child sized, sturdy and balanced, accurate in representation of the "real thing," and in good repair. Several schools of thought exist regarding the realistic versus somewhat abstract designs for use in furniture. Furnishings that are durable and made of natural wood or heavy plastic materials seem most appropriate as they can withstand the variety of uses imposed by children's play and can withstand the physical abuse as well. Durable furniture maintains its appearance which is an important factor in providing a constant and respectful environment for children's play. Broken parts, doors that fall off, poorly cared for and badly painted furniture do not significantly inhibit children's symbolic play, but over time these practices do not denote a respect for their involvement.

Supplies, clothing, accessories, and props placed in the symbolic play area must

be maintained in an organized, neat manner. This again reflects a priority in teacher planning for symbolic play and a respect for the children's needs and capabilities to learn and express themselves through symbolic play. It is often argued that children should be made to "clean up" the symbolic play area. However, there is a difference between putting major pieces of clothing, accessories, dishes, and chairs back into some kind of order and actually returning the area to a "set-up" status. Teachers must always do a more careful and thorough "pick-up" of the area by returning dishes to neat stacks, sorting and folding clothes, and placing props in order on shelves. Young children do not possess the organizational abilities to return such a creatively used area to its original state and cannot be expected to fully understand why or how it is to be done. An environment which is organized, well supplied, and respectfully presented will indeed make it easier for their symbolic play to proceed more spontaneously. The frustration of having to search through a "junk box" of supplies creates frustration, loss of interest, or anger. It is easy to see the difference in the supportive and creative nature of the children's play when materials are within reach and play occurs and the decision not to play when the area lacks order and organization. Symbolic play takes extra time to arrange and maintain, yet benefits are well documented and essential.

Ideas to Try

* Have children brainstorm ideas for symbolic play materials. Older preschoolers could explore the practicality of these suggestions.

* Involve families in providing materials that reflect the cultural or ethnic heritage of the group members, occupations of the region, or current news items.

* Use field trips as inspiration for symbolic play and the objects that could be used.

* Develop collages related to topics for symbolic play and use these to begin new areas of play or replenish supplies in ones already in use.

**Prop Boxes**

The major curriculum material presented in this book considers the use of prop boxes for designing symbolic play options for young children. Prop boxes serve to transform a physical space into a variety of themes for children's symbolic play. Prop boxes are simply a collection of accessories, materials, and equipment established by teachers to be used for children's symbolic play. These materials may be "housed" in a variety of containers and while a "box" is the traditional storage unit, cartons, tubes, bags, and shelf space are all suitable for storage.

There exists in the early childhood curriculum literature any number of lists of materials for use in assembling prop boxes. This guide presents a way to organize the types of prop boxes so that they may be used to help facilitate and encourage different types of play. The overlapping, and somewhat confusing nature of prop box

themes and their use in symbolic play areas presented a challenge to the authors who chose to consider what particular aspect of symbolic play the prop box was designed to emphasize. For example, in using the prop box defined as "doctor" is the child expected to "play the doctor role" or is the child given the opportunity to play a self-determined role shaped by the environment established as the doctor's office? It is the authors' perspective that children should not be asked to "play at" a specific role - occupational or otherwise - but be allowed to be creative at social play within a symbolic play setting. They may choose to "play" a familiar role or explore new ones.

The prop boxes suggested here are for use in building a comprehensive symbolic play program and are classified into three areas: place, event, and thing. Each is defined in the following paragraphs. It should be remembered however, that individual programs should build their own boxes around new ideas from the children, regional identities, cultural patterns, and special materials that become available.

**"Place" Prop Boxes**

Prop box materials may be collected to help represent concrete experiences and roles to be played in a specific setting (e.g., dental office, hat store, ranch). Children may be guided to take on certain roles in these settings and to use the materials as they find them most useful, interesting, and enjoyable. Furniture should be rearranged to represent the setting and children should be guided and cued as to what is in the "place."

New-to-an-area or new-to-the-country children can benefit from "place" prop boxes, for this type of play helps the children sort out what the components of the

new culture are like. They also tend to ask questions of peers about "places" and in general, explore these unfamiliar settings.

**"Event" Prop Boxes**

Event prop boxes are designed to represent a social "happening" in which children and families participate. The role taken in this type of symbolic play process is one of being a spectator or a participant (e.g., camping can be done in a variety of locations since it is not a set "place"). For this type of symbolic play, children are freer to establish personalized roles. This category also allows for development of cultural experiences, such as fiesta, Chinese New Year, or parade. This category becomes difficult however for such uses of symbolic play categories as the "zoo". The zoo is a place but also going to the zoo is an event. (If there is a lack of clarity of what is to be done with a symbolic play theme on the part of teachers, visualize how unclear children's roles are when they are told to play "zoo" without clear guidelines as to what "to do" when they play.) Events are time and schedule defined (i.e., bed time, birthday party, garage or tag sale) and should be considered as making play available for a special occasion.

Cultural practices and family traditions become a focus of "event" prop boxes and children's views of their own customs become highlighted for classmates and teachers. This contributes to the development of positive self concept when all the children are playing your "event" just like you do at home.

**"Things" Prop Boxes**

The final category of classification is the use of "things" or objects in a symbolic play area. A placing of such items as masks, party hats, feathers, luggage, objects that are all similar in use (i.e., cameras) leads to a different type of symbolic play in that the objects and their imaginative use by the children is the focus of the play. The actual symbolic play physical area is no longer the agent of interaction but objects or "things" become the interest point, and children are free to pick and choose their level of use and participation. Children might be given objects that are related to a story like Corduroy they are familiar with and allowed to participate as they wish in parts of the story. The children are not to act as if the experience is to be a "performance" (which is not symbolic play). More appropriately, they explore the objects and talk with other children who are nearby and begin to initiate their own role based play about Corduroy.

Each of the prop box play categories presented in this book serves to direct or focus play in a slightly different way. Each may be used as teachers feel is appropriate. Use of a variety of prop boxes throughout the year will broaden the range and depth of play options for any symbolic setting. These lists represent some of the basics - go forth and create prop boxes that will be great ones for you!

**Symbolic Play as Project**

The seminal work by Katz and Chard (1989) about children's involvement in projects is most applicable to symbolic play. A project is defined as "an in-depth study of a particular topic that one or more children undertake" (p. 2). Project

involvement is maintained over several days, involves the use of multiple areas of the classroom and emphasizes active participation in, and direction by, the children. Children or their teachers may select any number of topics or ideas for project use. Symbolic play is one aspect of direct play involvement which contributes to the integrated nature of project-based curriculum.

For example, if children select to do a project on farms, the symbolic play area may be designed to represent many dimensions of farm life over the duration of the project, such as the barn, the house, a shed for storing equipment, a farm machinery area, horses for riding, or dairy operations. The symbolic play area may be used in the same arrangement over several days, and individual designs for the area may be repeated more than once during the duration of the project.

Teachers may also use the symbolic play area for special events (e.g., circus, rodeo, a play) and as a means to begin projects and assist children in learning to identify what they find of interest. The process of implementing a project is reflective of symbolic play as a way to support the social life of the classroom and the "community ethos of the class" (Katz & Chard, 1989, p. 6).

To enhance and encourage symbolic play, thought must be given to the total environment presented to the child players, the room or outdoor arrangement, materials to be included, and policies related to time and group size.

**The Teacher's Role in Symbolic Play**

Teachers of young children can play an important role in facilitating symbolic play. Both indirect and direct guidance effectively offer support, encouragement,

stimulation, and specific strategies to assist children throughout their play processes. The physical environment is set up to promote symbolic play through inviting equipment and materials. In addition, children come to the play setting with their own unique personalities, cultural backgrounds, and individual differences. Teachers, as well, can act as facilitators, consultants, and managers by encouraging children's play. It is best when all three elements--the physical environment, the child, and the teacher--are considered and incorporated into the plan for a supportive atmosphere facilitating children's symbolic play.

Indirectly, teachers need to provide a positive atmosphere and physical environment in which symbolic play takes place. An attitude on the part of the teacher which encourages freedom of expression in a secure environment promotes children's play opportunities (Coleman, 1982). As described earlier, space and time are needed in order for children to engage in play without interuptions (Seefeldt, 1990; Uhde, 1983; Waite-Stupiansky, 1990). A variety of props stimulate interest, elicit additional information from teachers, and provide verbal and physical contributions from adults that enhance play situations.

Directly, teachers should be involved by unobtrusively guiding, facilitating, and managing symbolic play situations. The environment needs to be set up to stimulate the variety of children's needs and interests, for there are always children of various developmental levels, personality differences, and special needs involved in the preschool or child care setting.

Handicapped children may be hesitant to participate in symbolic play, and the teacher may need to encourage involvement by suggesting the special child play with

the teacher. Focusing on a single activity may be a way for the intellectually impaired child to enter the group "You can rock the baby. Here's the baby." and "Perhaps you could be the ticket-taker on the train." Then the adult can gradually withdraw as the child feels more comfortable. The special child might also be encouraged through parallel play nearby with a few similar objects. The child can observe what the others are doing in their play and then imitate or model what they see (Karnes, 1991).

The physically restricted child can participate fully in symbolic play if care is taken to ensure space for wheelchairs and crutches and consideration for those who cannot see the objects and people, are distracted by extraneous noise, or lack the ability to contribute to the verbal interaction.

**Use of Materials**

Modification of symbolic play materials, themes, and expectations are needed to adapt to the individual differences in each group of children. This is the teacher's responsibility. Realistic props help younger children feel more comfortable with materials and their uses. Less realistic props encourage older children to use their imaginations when playing with materials (Trawick-Smith, 1985). Open-ended materials invite a variety of uses to meet children's needs and interests.

Ideas to Try

* A real telephone, toaster, and cash register help younger children feel comfortable with dramatic play materials. (Watch for safety if the item has an electrical cord. Tie a large wooden bead to the cord to prevent attempts to "plug" into a socket).

* Cardboard boxes used as spaceships, or wooden blocks used as radios help to encourage older children's imaginitive play with less realistic props.

* Flour, sifters, measuring cups, and bowls in the kitchen area offer open-ended materials to use for 'pretend' baking in a variety of ways.

* Flashlights and covered hiding places provide many opportunities for exploration.

* Baskets, gourds, wooden paddles, and lengths of cloth recognize cultures and ethnic groups not always represented in the materials provided.

**Adapting Materials and Themes**

Children of different family backgrounds benefit from symbolic play situations which reflect their own specific families. Various cultural heritages, family forms, geographic areas, and family occupations should be reflected in the props used. Care should also be taken to reduce gender stereotyping in symbolic play situations.

Familiar themes encourage less experienced children to become involved, while more experienced children benefit from unusual themes which provide opportunities for creativity and growth. House play, bedtime play, or store play invite inexperienced children to play in situations they know about. On the other hand, unusual themes like jungles with dinosaurs, dance studios, or plumber's shops offer new activities for more experienced or older children to explore.

Ideas to Try

* A parent with a real baby who visits the house area helps children adjust to new siblings in their own family, or materials such as suitcases, clothes to pack, and two separate homes are beneficial for children of divorced familes to use.

* Culturally appropriate kitchen utensils and food items (e.g., woks and chopsticks, tortilla packages), ethnic dolls, dress-up clothes, music, and pictures from various cultures in the group provide a source of personal identity.

* Fishing and beach-combing props assist children from coastal areas and farming, ranching, or logging props help children from rural backgrounds to feel comfortable in the dramatic play area.

* Different occupations like medical personnel, sporting goods store owners, and police officers can be reflected in materials provided, and opportunities for both boys and girls to take on roles such as doctors, nurses, caregiver, and worker increase their options and limit stereotyping.

**Building on Interests of the Group**

Children tend to be more involved in symbolic play when teachers follow their

lead rather than imposing teacher-directed ideas on them. Favorite themes which are repeated help children stay interested, and materials may be added or subtracted as children's interests change.

Ideas to Try

* Materials made by children in the art area such as letters, birthday cards, and party hats may be brought into the house area.

* Props like chairs and blocks to use as vehicles may be added when needed.

* Books may be added to read to the babies,or the children can make books in the art center to read to the babies.

* Fieldtrips to observe animals, visitors who demonstrate spinning and weaving yarn, and books about woodworking provide more information for children to use in their play.

**Encouraging Cognitive and Verbal Skills**

Talking to children about the roles they take on while playing will help to increase their cognitive and language skills. Children's thinking abilities and word useage are enhanced while elaborating on their play by adding information and props to the role play situations from other activities in the curriculum (Uhde, 1983). The teacher needs to become a consultant to the children to help explore ideas, clarify

concepts, and expand on appropriate vocabulary to use. The current "whole language" approach is useful for symbolic play at the early childhood level.

Ideas to Try

* Signs such as "waiting room," "doctor's office," and "emergency room" used effectively with prop boxes, and literary materials like cookbooks, telephone books, and calendars promote children's language skills. A pad of paper and pencils for lists or notes are objects needed to add realism for the child.

* Additional information, new vocabulary words, and props to use with roles, e.g., "It looks like the mechanic needs to put new spark plugs in the engine," help to expand children's information base.

* Dishes, pots and pans, and appliances matched to their pictures and names in appropriate places in the house area help children with one-to-one correspondence and word identification.

* Questions asked by teachers about what children are doing to get ready for the birthday party or the trip to grandma's encourages creative thinking, development of temporal relations and vocabulary useage.

**Managing Social Roles**

Teachers who appropriately observe, evaluate, intervene, and then withdraw from symbolic play situations offer support to children who attempt to manage their own social roles. Teacher involvement which is timed so as not to interrupt children's play encourages children's independence and self-direction. After watching the play situation and evaluating what is happening, teachers should skillfully step in to maintain or extend children's play, then allow children to continue on their own when help is no longer needed. Teachers support symbolic play when they help to create harmony in the area (Hildebrand, 1990), maintain appropriate limits, and provide children with additional ideas of how to continue with their play.

Children with limited social skills or emotional difficulties require more supervision and teacher intervention in the beginning, but their desire to remain a part of the play frequently motivates a behavior change. They "settle" down and are productive group players.

<u>Ideas to Try</u>

* Words given to children who act physically toward others, e.g., "It hurts when you push so hard; Tell him you'd like a turn with the police officer's hat," help to assist in expressing needs.

* Interpretations of children's feelings to others, e.g., "It looks like she is angry because she can't have the doll now," help children interact with one another.

* An understanding of the elements of dramatic play, e.g., imitative role play, make-believe with objects, and verbal communication assists teachers in evaluating children's play situations and providing suggestions on how to expand and advance their play.

* As a co-player, teachers model appropriate behavior by demonstrating the elements missing in children's role playing abilities, e.g, pretending with a thing like a box as a telephone.

* Maintaining respect for the roles the children play, e.g. not laughing at a child who enthusiastically becomes a puppy or a horse, helps children feel comfortable in the roles they have chosen.

**Assisting the Non-Involved**

Some children, such as those with special needs, various cultural backgrounds, or certain personality characteristics, need assistance in becoming involved in symbolic play situations. Merely the physical presence of the teacher in the dramatic play area helps insure a safer environment for the non-involved children to risk getting involved with others. In addition, active teacher involvement provides a role model of appropriate behavior to those children (Karnes, 1991; Smilansky, 1968). Role play practice by teachers and children helps children with experiences to use in symbolic play. Prompting by teachers gives non-involved children specific ideas of what to do and say as well as feedback on the effects they have with peers. All this encourages

involvement in symbolic play.

Ideas to Try

* A fingerplay or song like "I'm a Little Teapot" or a story in which teachers and children use various voices for the characters help children gain experience in taking on roles. A good beginning for assuming a new role can be listening to a tape or record with examples of voice changes.

* Support roles identified for children or additional props provided for the non-involved children help to introduce them into the play situations, e.g., "You can be the babysitter when the mom goes to the store."

* Children who are given specific ideas of what to do or say, e.g., "Show the doctor the cut on your arm" benefit from such prompting.

* Feedback given to children on their effects with peers, e.g., "You helped the pizza makers make a new kind of pizza with the pepperoni you added," provide children with information on the success of their involvement in the group's play.

**Effective Teacher Interactions**

Teachers effectively interact in symbolic play situations when they use reflective statements to talk to children about what they are doing. The teacher may

have an interchange with a child such as, "You have just come from visiting the doctor, and I see your baby has a bandage on her arm." Non-threatening statements such as these offer support and encouragement and provide additional ideas to children about how they can play together more effectively. Teachers' use of open-ended questions which require no correct responses are the least threatening and most supportive of children's efforts. The teacher can interact by saying, "It is cold outside today. How will you stay warm on your hike up the mountain?"

Ideas to Try

* Observational statements provide information for the children, e.g., "I see you're buying some fruit at the store."

* Suggestions made to children about ways to interact directly with one another, e.g., "One of you could hold the football while the other one kicks it" give them specific ideas to try.

* Clarification of children's behavior for those who don't know what is happening in the play situation, e.g., "I think the driver is getting ready to start the boat engine" helps to facilitate the play.

* Open-ended questions which need no specific responses help children in dramatic play situations, e.g., "What are you having to eat on your picnic?"

To stimulate and encourage children's imaginative symbolic play, teachers should take time to adapt materials and themes to children's needs, elaborate on group interests, and interact effectively to promote social, cognitive and verbal skills.

## DRAMATIC PLAY

| PLACE | PLACE, cont. | EVENT | THING |
|---|---|---|---|
| Airport | Kitchen | Art Sale | Accessories |
| Animals (zoo, farm,) | Laundry | Bedtime | Cat in the Hat |
| Animal Forest | Mall | Birthday Party | Flashlights |
| Art Supply Store | Movie Theatre | Boat Ride | Masks |
| Auto Repair Shop | Nursery | Camping | Monster |
| Bakery | Office/Worker | Dressing for Winter | Outer Space- |
| Barber/Beauty Parlor/Shop | Optometrist's Office | Fishing | Party Hats |
| Barnyard/Western | Painter/Design Studio | Halloween | |
| Car Wash | Pet Shop | Hiker's Day | |
| Carpenter's Workshop | Police Station | Holidays | |
| Construction Building | Post Office/Post Office Box | Housekeeping | |
| Dairy | Plumber's Box/Plumbers Shop | Garage Sale | |
| Dance Studio | Ranch | Garbage Colletion | |
| Dental Office | Recycle Center | Picnic | |
| Doctor's Office/Health Care | Rent-a-Car | Sports- Athletics | |
| Drive in/ Fast Food | Restaurant/Food Service | Tea Party Box | |
| Farm/Ranch | School Days | Transportation | |
| Fast Food | Seamstress/Tailor | Travel | |
| Fire Station/Service Station | Seashore | | |
| Fix It Shop | Shoe Store | | |
| Flower Shop | Spaceship | | |
| Gas Station/Service Station | Sporting Good Store | | |
| Gift Shop | Store | | |
| Grocery Store | Teacher-School | | |
| Hair Cut/Beauty Salon | Telephone Company | | |
| Hat Store | Train Station | | |
| Hospital/Doctor's Office | Underwater-Sea | | |
| House | Zoo | | |
| Ice Cream Store | | | |
| Jungle w/ Dinosaurs | | | |

## PLACE

### AIRPORT

MATERIALS:

Maps
Caps
Badges
Tickets
Menus
Travel folders
Steering wheel
Serving trays
Cockpit (packing box)
Suitcases
Overalls
Dress up clothes for travel
Dolls
Blankets
Telephone

VOCABULARY:

Steering wheel
Badges
Tickets
Cockpit
Caps
Menus

### ANIMALS - ZOO, FARM, RELATED THEME (eg. Stuffed Animals)

MATERIALS:

**Animals**:
(Same scale sizes)
Wooden life size
Miniature
Rubber-plastic
Farm or zoo fences
Farm/zoo buildings
Straw- rocks - sand
Trees - foliage - grass

**Categories**:
Bears
Horses
Pets
Birds
Farm AnimalsBirds
Zoo Animals
Domestic

VOCABULARY:

Miniature
Rubber/plastic
Straw
Domestic
Stuffed Animals

## PLACE

### BIRTHDAY PARTY

MATERIALS:

Hats
Name markers
Streamers
Plastic foods
Plastic cups
Candles
Wrapped presents

VOCABULARY:

Wrapping paper

### CAMPING - OUT OF DOORS

MATERIALS:

Tent - sheet over frame
Sticks
Rocks
Back pack
Camoflauge dress up gear
Canteen
Lantern
Cooking pots/pans
rope
folding chairs/camp stool
Water container
mess
Small food pakages
Bed roll

VOCABULARY:

Camoflauge
Lantern
Pots/pans
Rope
Camp stool
Folding chairs

## PLACE

### DOCTOR'S OFFICE

MATERIALS:

Pictures/photos of:

**OUTSIDE**
Doctors and nurses

**INSIDE**
White shirts for uniforms
Band aids
Gauze
Tape
Tongue depressers
Pill bottles
Nurses' caps (can be made from paper)
Small suitcase or purse for doctor's bag
stethoscope
Plastic syringes with needles removed

VOCABULARY:

Uniforms
Caps
Tongue depressers
Suitcase
Stethoscope
Syringes

### HEALTH CARE

MATERIALS:

Nurses cap
Tape
Cotton
Two telephones
Doctor kit
Thermometer
Glass frames
Unbreakeable supplies
Scales
Measuring chart
Strip bandages
Stetoscope
Scale/height chart
White shirts
Flash light
Rubber bones
Eye chart
Table (examining)/chair
Dolls
Bed or cot
Towels
Glasses without lenses

VOCABULARY:

Cotton
Doctor kit
Thermometer
Scales
Measuring
Chart
Stetoscope
Rubber
Examining
Flash light
Cot

## PLACE

### FIRE STATION

MATERIALS:

Coded box
Firehats
Boots
Sleeping bags or cots
Bed
Telephone
Dolls
Old Newspapers
Steering wheel
Old radio
Hat
Badge
Toy truck or wagon
Hose (or rope)
Walkie Talkies
Megaphone

VOCABULARY:

Badge
Hose
Walkie talkies
Steering wheel
Megaphone
Sleeping bags

### SERVICE STATION

MATERIALS:

Rubber hose connected
to a box decorated
like a gas pump
Empty oil cans
Air pumps/toy gas pump
Sponge
Bucket and rubber wiper
Rags
Old tire and air filter
Cash register and play money
Spark plugs
Play automobiles
Tools
Flashlight
Cap
Keys

VOCABULARY:

Rubber hose
Gas Pumps
Air pumps
Sponge
Bucket
Spark plugs
Tools
Flashlight
Cash register

## GAS - STATION

MATERIALS:

**OUTSIDE**
Pictures or photos of:
Gas Station
Gas station personnel
gas pumps
Cars being filled
Washed and repaired inside

**INSIDE**
Workclothes
Hats
Empty oil can
Hose or tubing (for gas pump)
Paper towels
Plastic spray bottles
Car jack and lug wrench

VOCABULARY:

Gas station
Oil can
Lug wrench
Car jack
Plastic bottle
Spray
Pumps

## GIFT SHOP (See also shops)

MATERIALS:

Play money
Cash register
Receipts
Shelves
Various gift items:
- Boxes
- Basket
- Small toys
- Cards- gift
- Dishes
- Office type gifts
- Jewelry
- Magazines
- Books

Bags
Gift boxes

VOCABULARY:

Cash register
Receipts
Shelves
Boxes
Cards
Basket
Jewelry
Bags

## PLACE

### HAIR CUT/BEAUTY SALON

MATERIALS:

Hair dryer without electric cord
Curlers
Plastic scissors
Plastic basin
Comb
Hair nets
Apron or bib
Towels
Brushers
Empty plastic shampoo containers
Empty hair spray containers
Magazines
Mirror
Curling irons, brushes, without electric cord

VOCABULARY:

Curlers
Plastic basin
Apron/ bib
Containers
Hair dryer
Hair nets

### HAT STORE

MATERIALS:

Cash register
Play money
Hats (Display by various criteria)
men
woman
occupation
color
size
occasion - party, weather
use adult sized
miniture
plastic vs. natural fabrics

VOCABULARY:

Cash register
Occupation
Occasion
Size
Fabric

## PLACE

### POST OFFICE

MATERIALS:

Telephone
Stamps
Envelopes of all sizes
Paper
Mailbox and mailing bag
Rubber stamp
Packages, postcards, letters
Cash register/play money
Scale
Sign

VOCABULARY:

Stamps
Envelopes
Mailbox
Mailbag
Package
Postcard
Cash register
Scale
Sign

### POST OFFICE BOX

MATERIALS:

Picture/photos of:

**OUTSIDE**
Mail carriers driving trucks
Emptying mailboxes
Delivering mail from house to house
People inside a post office

**INSIDE**
Old shoulderstrap purses or paper bags with shoulder straps stapled on
Canceled stamps or seals
Envelopes
Paper
Postage scale
Rubber stamp and ink pad

VOCABULARY:

Carrier
Trucks
shoulderstrap
Purse
Scale
Seals/stamps
Rubber stamp
Ink pad

## PLACE

### SEASHORE

MATERIALS:

Bathing cap
Sun hats
Beach towels
Sea shells
Picnic basket
Thermos
Beach ball
Pails and shovels
Empty suntan oil bottles
Sunglasses
Radio

VOCABULARY:

Bathing cap
Sea shells
Thermos
Pails
Shovels

### SHOE STORE BOX

MATERIALS:

Picture/photos of:

**OUTSIDE**
Shoes (child, adult, male and female shoes)
People having their feet measured
People trying on shoes

**INSIDE**
A variety of shoes
Ruler (or something to measure feet with)
shoe boxes
shoe horns

VOCABULARY:

Measure
Ruler
Shoe horns
Variety
Cash register

### SHOE STORE

MATERIALS:

Shoe boxes
Old shoes
Chairs
Cash register/play money
Foot measuring device

**EVENT**

**TRANSPORTATION (LAND)**

**TAXI BUS SUBWAY**

MATERIALS:

Cap
Lunch box
Coveralls (bib types)
Lantern (no glass)
Neckerchief
Work shoes
Chairs (lined up for "cars")

VOCABULARY:

Cap
Coveralls
Lantern
Neckerchief
Subway

**TRAVEL**

MATERIALS:

Tickets
Paseports
Stubs for tickets
Maps
Hat - drivers/pilots
Magazines
Doll and carrier
Suitcase
Blankets - baby

VOCABULARY:

Tickets
Stubs
Maps
Suitcase

## EVENT

### GARDENING

MATERIALS:

Seeds
Pots - flat boxes
Soil
Water can
Garden tools
Watering hose
Gloves
Apron

VOCABULARY:

Seeds
Soil
Pots
Gloves
Hose
Apron

### PICNIC

MATERIALS:

Picnic basket
Blanket
Red checked table cloth
Radio
Plastic plates, forks, spoons, and cups
Cloth napkins
Mustard, ketchup, pickles
Plastic food containers (various shapes)

VOCABULARY:

Picnic
Basket
Mustard
Pickles
Containers

NOTE: Locate near housekeeping center. The stove, sink, etc. can serve as the restaurant's kitchen.)

**EVENT**

**HOUSEKEEPING**

MATERIALS:

Miniature tables
Chairs
Stoves
Refrigerators
Sinks
Used adult furniture
Household utensils
- pots/pans
- disks
- cooking tools
- eating
- tools
- ironing table/iron

Dolls and doll accessories
- carriages
- cradles
- crib

Cleaning supplies
- mops/brooms
- dustpans
- empty spray bottles

Adult clothing
- shoes
- hats
- dresses
- pants coats

Adult accessories
- handbag
- briefcases
- gloves
- scarves

VOCABULARY:

Miniature
Stoves
Refrigerators
Sinks
Household
Utensils
Tools
Supplies
Pots
Pans
Briefcase

## EVENT

### FISHING

MATERIALS:

Fishing boots
Rain gear
Fishing poles - magnetic
Varoius sized fish
Blue blanket for water
Small picnic basket
Tackel box - (hooks?)
Boat for travel
Basket/pail for keeping fish

VOCABULARY:

Boat
Travel
Fish
Picnic basket
Tackel box
Pail
Fishing poles

### HALLOWEEN (See holiday box)

MATERIALS:

Sheets
Pillowcases
Long wigs
Black hats and capes
Brooms
Plastic insects
Tape recorder and
spooky music

VOCABULARY:

Wig
Cape
Broom
Insects
Tape recorder
Spooky

## "THING PROP BOXES"

### FLASHLIGHTS

MATERIALS:

Several styles and types of flashlights, tent or closed in sturcture for darkness

VOCABULARY:

Flashlight
Battery
Flasher
Dark

### MASKS

MATERIALS:
Variety of face masks
Halloween characters
Veils
Ethnic masks
Paper plate
Chairs/pillows for sitting
Tent or closed in area for hiding

VOCABULARY:
Mask
Character (names)
String or tape

THING

### ELECTRIC MOTORS

MATERIALS:

Small Motors
Appliances
Copper Wire

VOCABULARY:

Magnets
Electrical Poles
Generate
Friction
Spark

### INTERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINES

MATERIALS:

Auto Engine
Lawnmower Engine
Steam Engine
Spark Plug
Wrench
Oil Can

VOCABULARY:

Piston
Cylinder
Cam Shaft
Spark Plug
Distributor
Spark

Boat Engine
Muffler
Exhaust
Engine Block
Valve Stems

Compression
Starter
Carburetor
Oil Pan
Piston Rod
Valves

THING

SIMPLE MACHINES

MATERIALS:

Pulley
Incline Plane
Screw
Wheel & Axle
Wedge

VOCABULARY

Threads
Angle
Screw
Wedge
Plane
Level
Pulley

LOCKS

MATERIALS:

Padlocks & Keys
Locking Doorknob & Keys
Deadbolt & Key
Sliding Bolt
Barn Door Latch
Combination Locks

VOCUABULARY:

Cylinder
Keys
Bolt
Sliding
Latch
Padlock
Doorknob

BOATS & SHIPS

MATERIALS:

Models of Canoes
Pleasure Boats
Fishing Trawlers
Tankers
Tugs
Ferries
Passenger Liners
Ocean-going

VOCABULARY:

Canoe
Trawler
Tanker
Tug Boat
Ferry
Ship
Raft

Ships
Sailboats
Rafts

**PIPES**

MATERIALS:

Variety of sizes of Pipe
Metal Pipe (Gloves)
Copper Pipe
Smoking Pipe
Stovepipe
Garden Hose
Wrench

VOCABULARY:

Threaded Pipe
Hose
Wrench

**FAUCETS**

MATERIALS:

Single Faucets
Mixer Faucets
Different Faucet Handles

VOCABULARY:

Mixer
Handle
Washers
Values
Turn

**TELEPHONES**

MATERIALS:

Dial Phone
Touchtone Phone
Portable Phone
Microphone
Message Machine
Walkie-talkie

VOCABULARY:

Communication
Message
"Over and Out

**CALCULATORS**

MATERIALS:

Adding Machine
Pocket Calculator

VOCABULARY:

Machine
Calculator

Printing Calculator
Abacus
Counting Chips

Tape
Abacus

**BEATERS/MIXERS**

MATERIALS:

Egg Beater
Whisk
Asian Flip
Portable Mixer
Fork
Spoons

VOCABULARY:

Whip
Stir
Beat
Mixer

**GLOVES & MITTENS**

MATERIALS:

Winter Ones
Hot Pads
Protective
Rubber (household)
Medical
Garden
Space
Outdoor - leather
Cycling
Raquet - handball
Dress up

VOCABULARY:

Pads
Mittens
Gloves

**TIMEPIECES**

MATERIALS:

Watches
Digital
Analog
Clocks-many
Hourglass
Pocketwatch
Wristwatch
Calendars (variety)

VOCABULARY:

Hour
Second
Measure
Clock
Pocketwatch
Wrist
Digital

**TICKETS**

MATERIALS:

Airline
Bus
Money
Hole Punch
Stamper & Pad
Traffic
Ferry Ticket
Subway Ticket
Coin changer
Train Ticket

VOCABULARY:

Ticket
Validate
Punch
Change
Money

## SINGLE THEME CONCEPTS - SYMBOLIC PLAY

**COLOR**
Blue, red, green, yellow, black, brown, pink,
white, orange

**SHAPES**
Square, triangle, rectangle, circle

**OBJECTS**
Housewares, clothing- hats, gloves, shoes
swimsuits, etc.

**TIME**
Nightime, morning, special events

**CLASSIFICATIONS**
Big/little, opposites, same with slight variations

**SEASONS**

**Winter** **Spring** **Summer** **Fall**

Target colors foe each season
Colored streamers
Picture symbols- posters
Costume materials
Hats - head gear
Outwear
Appropriate sporting/recreation equipment

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